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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

FILE COPY

Date: September 10, 1969

SUBJECT: Impact of Ambassador Elbrick's Kidnapping

PARTICIPANTS: Solon Borges dos Reis, President, São Paulo Association
of Primary School Teachers, and ARENA State Deputy
John D. Blacken, Political Officer, Amconsul São Paulo
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COPIES TO: Amembassy Brasilia
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1. Mr. dos Reis has extensive contacts throughout the state due to his work as President of the Primary Teachers' Association and as state deputy (More information concerning him is contained in another memcon "Brazilian Regime Accused...." also dated September 10, 1969). His views concerning the impact of Ambassador Elbrick's kidnapping and release follow:

2. Impact of Kidnapping and Release. The first reaction was of revulsion, because political kidnapping was not in the Brazilian tradition and, secondly, the victim was a foreign guest in Brazil. Subsequent events, however, tended to create some grudging admiration for the kidnappers. The manifesto written by the Ambassador's captors described conditions in Brazil in much the same way as a large majority of the people see them. Nearly everyone knows someone who has been arrested or harassed in some way by the authorities. People are resentful of censorship and repression. Many people are asking themselves the same question posed by the kidnappers, i.e., "Why was the Vice President not permitted to take over in the President's absence?" The act of forcing of the Government to lift censorship and permit the kidnappers' manifesto and notes to be printed earned the approval of many people. The

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bold manner in which the abduction was carried out also caused some admiration. The prisoners selected for release were skillfully chosen in order to arouse public sympathy. Finally, the safe release of the Ambassador and announcement that he had been well treated caused a great relief, and the impression that the kidnappers were men of their word. Many people had satisfaction in seeing the Government, which they considered repressive and against which they felt impotent to react, humiliated before the world.

3. The Ambassador's Image. The Ambassador's public statement after his release had a very favorable effect upon the Brazilian people. They judged it to be a calm, frank, and balanced account of a frightening experience. His candor in expressing himself contrasted sharply with the GOB's refusal to discuss controversial issues. The ~~net~~ ^{net} effect was that Ambassador Elbrick has created an image for himself as a sympathetic, frank, and understanding person--qualities which are admired.

4. The Impact and Consequences of the Decision to Release the Prisoners. The three Minister Heads of State made the right decision in acceding to the kidnappers' demands. This decision was probably supported by the great majority of the people. While the fact that the Government accepted the kidnappers' terms might create a precedent for use in other countries, other ambassadors or diplomats in Brazil would be safe during the near future. This sort of kidnapping for political impact was good only once. Very possibly, however, Brazilian military officers or government officials would be future targets. Military opponents of the ruling triumvirate would try to use the incident to topple the regime.

5. GOB Committing Mistakes. To defend itself from attacks of the right-wing in the military due to the decision to release the prisoners, the triumvirate was taking a series of tough measures. For example, people were being rounded up by the police on a wholesale basis in Rio de Janeiro. People who are innocent would resent such treatment. The adoption of the death penalty and the banning of the 15 prisoners from Brazil would create more opposition; the banning of the prisoners, especially, stimulated sympathy for them. The tough measures were designed solely to calm spirits of people on the radical right; in other sectors the repercussions would be adverse.

6. Comment: Mr. dos Reis is not a man given to hasty conclusions. Information which he has given us in the past has been found to be accurate, and his judgment has usually been sound.

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